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NSC BRIEFING

1 December 1953

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IMPLICATIONS OF HO CHI MINH'S STATEMENT

Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh was quoted on 29 November, in the non-Communist Stockholm newspaper Expressen, as "prepared to discuss" a proposal from France for a settlement in Indochina. The paper described Ho's statement as made in response to questions it had submitted on 5 November through the Viet Minh embassy in Peiping.

Ho said that to arrive at an armistice "the French government must suspend hostilities. . . . The basis for such an armistice is that the French government really respect the independence of Vietnam." Also, while leaving the door ajar for neutral intercession, he emphasized that armistice negotiations "are essentially an affair between the governments of France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

Ho spoke of France's victimization by "American imperialism," which is pressing the war in Vietnam in order to weaken

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France and take over its position in Vietnam. He referred to American pressure for the ratification of EDC, which he said, "implies that German militarism will be reborn."

What Ho's statements add up to is that he says he is willing to negotiate, but that the French must take the initiative. He conceives of a cease-fire as a cessation of hostilities on the French side, but makes no commitment respecting his own forces. He ignores the Vietnam government and Bao Dai and says the Viet Minh alone represents the Vietnamese people.

The statement is the most forthright yet made by the Viet Minh on the question of negotiations, previous comments having been no more than vague hints. But there is no convincing evidence that the Viet Minh at this time urgently desires the prompt conclusion of a negotiated settlement.

Ho appears primarily interested in generating doubt and suspicion in the minds of non-Communist Vietnamese, and in exploiting war-weariness in France. In concert with his Orbit

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partners, moreover, he is probably seeking to disrupt Atlantic unity. It is likely that Orbit policy will continue in the immediate future to be based on the premise that a war of attrition in Indochina offers greater advantages than either peace or an expanded Communist war effort.

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The French press and party leaders from all parts of the political spectrum, though treating Ho's "offer" with reserve, have indicated that they want its possibilities fully explored.

Official and unofficial opinion in Vietnam is unanimously opposed to negotiations. The vice premier has called Ho's offer a trap. Bao Dai has described it as a sign of Communist weakness and rejected any talks with Ho. Premier Tam's view,

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expressed in Paris, that negotiations might be undertaken under certain conditions, is distinctly in the minority. Anti-Communist Vietnamese opposition to negotiations with the Viet Minh raises a formidable barrier to any French attempts to deal with Ho.

Regarding Ho himself, many reports have been received that he is dead. He is now 63, quite old for a Vietnamese, and he always appeared very frail. He has not been seen by a non-Communist since 12 May 1947. This was the occasion of a visit to Ho by a French emissary to open peace negotiations.

If Ho is dead there has been no positive indication of it in Viet Minh propaganda up to the present time. He is referred to as being very active, addressing the Viet Minh assembly and presiding over cabinet meetings. Various Communist journalists claim to have interviewed him.

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Prior to the interview with the Swedish newspaper, the

most recent comment attributed to Ho on the subject of peace

deplored the

misery which the Indochina war had brought to both the French

and Vietnamese peoples and declared as the common goal of

France and Vietnam "fraternal cooperation on the basis of

independence, justice, and peace."

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IMPLICATIONS OF HO CHI MINH'S STATEMENT

- I Viet Minh leader Ho Chi Minh quoted on 29 November in non-Communist Stockholm newspaper Expressen as "prepared to discuss" a proposal from France for a settlement in Indochina.
 - A. Ho's statement said to be in response to questions submitted on 5 November through the Viet Minh embassy in Peiping.
- II Ho said that to arrive at an armistice, "the French government must suspend hostilities The basis for such an armistice is that the French government really respect the independence of Vietnam."
 - A. While leaving door open for neutral intercession, stressed that negotiations "are essentially an affair between the governments of France and the Viet Minh."
 - B. Spoke of France's victimization by "American imperialism," which is pressing the war in Vietnam in order to weaken France, and take over its position in Vietnam.
 - C. Referred to American pressure for the ratification of EDC, which, he said, "implies that German militarism will be reborn."
- III Statement adds up to assertion that Ho is willing to negotiate, but that France must take the initiative.
 - A. Ho sees a cease-fire as a cessation of hostilities by French, but makes no commitment of his own.
 - B. He ignores the Vietnam government and Bao Dai; says the Viet Minh alone represents the Vietnamese people.
- IV Statement is most forthright yet made by Viet Minh on the question of negotiations.
 - A. No more than vague hints at negotiation in the past.
 - B. But there is no convincing evidence that the Viet Minh at this time urgently desire the prompt conclusion of a negotiated settlement.

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C. Ho appears primarily interested in causing confusion.

1. Wants to generate doubt and suspicion in the minds of non-Communist Vietnamese.
2. Wants to exploit war-weariness in France.
3. Wants, along with Orbit partners, to disrupt Atlantic unity.

D. Likely that Orbit policy will continue in the immediate future to be based on the premise that a war of attrition in Indochina offers greater advantages than either peace or expanded Communist war effort

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VI Official and unofficial opinion in Vietnam is unanimously opposed to negotiations.

- A. Vice-premier has called Ho's offer a trap.
- B. Bao Dai described it as a sign of Communist weakness, and rejected any talks with Ho.
- C. Premier Tam's view, expressed in Paris, that negotiations might be undertaken under certain conditions is distinctly in the minority.
- D. Vietnamese opposition to negotiations with the Viet Minh raises a formidable barrier to any French attempts to deal with Ho.

VII Regarding Ho himself, many reports received that he is dead.

- A. Now 63 -- quite old for a Vietnamese -- has always appeared frail.
- B. Not seen by a non-Communist since 12 May 1947. This was the occasion of a visit by a French emissary.

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- A. Referred to as being very active, addressing the Viet Minh assembly, and presiding over cabinet meetings.
- B. Various Communist journalists claim to have interviewed him.

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X Prior to the interview with the Swedish newspaper, the most recent comment attributed to Ho on the subject of peace

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deplored the misery which the Indochina war had brought the French and Vietnamese peoples.

- B. He declared as the common goal of France and Vietnam "fraternal cooperation on the basis of independence, justice, and peace."

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